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BEST CDS OF 2008

The 10th Annual CD, Er, MP3 Gift Guide

By *Ned Wharton*[Listen Now](#)[\[7 min 25 sec\] add to playlist](#)

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Ned Wharton will be talking about some of his selections and recommending more music in a live Web chat at 1:30 p.m. ET. [Click here to participate:](#)

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Weekend Edition's Eco-nomical Holidays series is a guide on seeking out eco-friendly and economical holiday gifts in these tough economic times.

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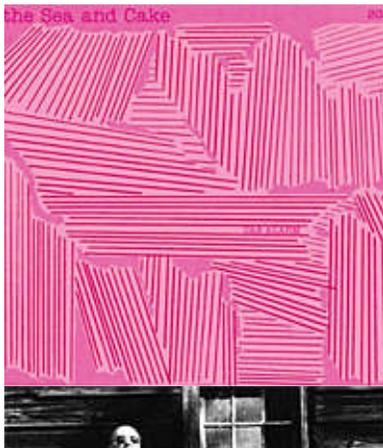
Weekend Edition Sunday, *December 14, 2008* - *Weekend Edition's* Eco-nomical Holidays series on saving money and the environment got me thinking: More than ever, music makes the perfect gift. Changes in the way music is sold have made it easy to be environmentally friendly, since downloaded music does away with plastic packaging and discs.

The most popular digital download program, of course, is Apple's iTunes. You can buy iTunes gift cards just about anywhere, but you needn't even buy the plastic card — just log on and send a load of music credit to a friend. Amazon also sells a lot of MP3s. Then there's indie-label-centric eMusic and (the now-legal) Napster and a whole raft of sites that operate on a subscription model, including Rhapsody. One great advantage of Rhapsody is that it allows you to listen to entire songs before you buy them (a feature long-overdue from iTunes).

Anyway, on to the 10th annual Director's Cuts gift guide. While we wait for Steve Jobs to post full iSamples, you can hear my recommendations in full here and buy the songs as an iTunes playlist using this link below:

[iMix: Director's Cuts Music Gift Guide 2008 \(Requires iTunes\)](#)

THE 10TH ANNUAL CD, ER, MP3 GIFT GUIDE



Rock: The Sea and Cake

Album: *Car Alarm*Song: *a Fuller Moon*

The Sea and Cake is a Chicago-based band that's been around since 1993, and *Car Alarm* is their 2008 release. I don't know about the "alarm" part of that title, but "car" seems apt. You can imagine these breezy cuts as perfect tunes for next summer's road trip.

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Rock: Cantinero

Album: *Better for the Metaphor*

Song: Selfish

Longtime listeners of *Weekend Edition* might remember Cantinero, a.k.a. Chris Hicken -- we traveled to New York to do a story on the music he made in his apartment. Recording that way had its challenges, evidenced by the sounds of his dogs barking that ended up on his last record. He's since moved upstate to a place that offers more space for his recording equipment and lots of room for his dogs to roam. He has some solid backing musicians now, and some six drummers, including Gogol Bordello's Tamir Muskat, contribute to various tracks.

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World: Pacifika

Album: Asunción

Song: Me Caí

For the world music fan, here's some music from Peru by way of Canada. Appropriately, that makes for tropical rhythms backed by some chilled-out beats. The Vancouver-based trio Pacifika is fronted by Peruvian-born singer Silvana Kane, joined by a Canadian guitarist and bass player from Barbados. This is a track from their debut album, *Asuncion*.

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Unclassified: Moss

Album: Moss

Song: Old Man

Brazilian singer Luciana Souza celebrates the power of the human voice with an interesting project called *Moss*. Souza says she ran into fellow singer Peter Eldridge on a train in New Jersey a few years ago, and they began conspiring to bring together. That group of innovative vocalists grew to include Theo Bleckmann, Kate McGarry and Lauren Kinhan. In this cut we hear a beautiful arrangement of the Neil Young song "Old Man."

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Carolyn Widmann Dénes Várjon
Robert Schumann The Violin Sonatas



Classical: Carolyn Widmann and Denes Varjon

Album: Schumann: The Violin Sonatas

Song: "Allegretto" from Sonata for Violin & Piano No. 1 in A Minor, Op. 105

For the classical music fan, here's a music suggestion featuring the violin sonatas of Robert Schumann. German violinist Carolyn Widmann plays violin accompanied by Hungarian pianist Denes Varjon. It's on ECM Records, which was founded in 1969 as an avant-garde jazz label and remains famous for its pristine recordings. That same recording sensibility is applied to their classical releases, which you can hear in this "Allegretto" movement from the Sonata No. 1 in A Minor.

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Jazz: Esbjorn Svensson Trio

Album: Leucocyte

Song: Premonition: Contorted

This past year saw the tragic death of innovative Swedish jazz pianist Esbjorn Svensson, who died at the age of 44 in a scuba accident. Years ago, his trio E.S.T. came to NPR's Studio 4A and showed off their unique

performance methods -- they plucked strings inside the piano, and ran the sound of both piano and standup bass through electronic processing. This kind of experimentation and improvisation is showcased on *Leucocyte*, a jam session recorded between gigs in Australia. Little did they know it would end up as the group's final release.

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